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Multi-stakeholder dialogue

Discussion paper contributed by the Workers and Trade Unions' major group**

Summary

Workers and trade unions express significant concern regarding the continued degradation of forests, the trends in markets and trade that run counter to sustainable forest management, and the continuing gap between working conditions and the International Labour Organization's Core Labour Standards. Lack of appropriate capacity-building as well as lack of access to decision-making processes continue to be issues of primary concern.

The Workers and Trade Unions' major group recommends that the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests remain a flexible yet prescriptive policy framework to which Member States will commit. It also recommends that the multi-year programme of work of the United Nations Forum on Forests include consideration of the following cross-cutting themes: the role of forests in poverty alleviation and in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, gender dimensions of forestry, land tenure issues, and human rights of indigenous peoples.

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** Prepared by Building and Wood Workers' International.

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I. Introduction

1. Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI) is the Global Union Federation grouping free and democratic unions with members in the building, building materials, wood, forestry and allied sectors. BWI groups together about 350 trade unions, representing about 12 million members in 135 countries. The headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland. Regional offices and project offices are located in Asia, Latin America and Africa.

2. The mission of BWI is to promote the development of trade unions in the building and wood industries throughout the world and to promote and enforce workers' rights in a context of sustainable development.

3. BWI recognizes the growing role of trade unions in addressing decreasing forest cover, water and food insecurities, the HIV pandemic, increasing poverty and informalization of work. It is on this premise that BWI has made a wake-up call for unions to integrate forestry issues into workplace concerns. With affiliates in sawmills, timber and wood-related industries, BWI has undertaken deliberate measures to relate the problem of job insecurity and decent work to environmental degradation.

4. In preparation for the seventh session of the United Nations Forum on Forests, the Workers and Trade Unions' major group has gathered input from: the BWI Global Forestry Network, made up of global forestry affiliates from Asia, Latin America, Africa and Europe; the Forest Dialogue, in which BWI participates as a member of the steering committee and is active in discussions, research, and study visits aimed towards demonstrating the social aspects of sustainable forest management; the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); the west Africa office of the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO); the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC); East Africa Forestry Unions; and the International Labour Organization (ILO) under the ILO Decent Work in Forestry Agenda. BWI would like to underscore the ever-increasing importance of working with major groups such as workers and trade unions, as this collaboration results in the harmonization of the three pillars of sustainable development.

5. Contributions of workers and trade unions to the implementation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests Proposals for Action and of the resolutions and decisions of the United Nations Forum on Forests, including the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), should be considered as critical and unique in that workers and trade unions bring to these forums information, best practices based on ground-based experiences and reliable information which is not often readily available to governments.

II. Priority areas for action

6. *Forests are not only about trees but very much about the people involved.* Workers' and civil society participation allows forestry policymakers to build decisions based on first-hand information and knowledge, which in turn helps to create broader ownership of forest decisions and form the basis for intervention around social issues in forestry.

7. The Workers and Trade Unions' major group is concerned about *the lack of linkages between sustainable development, sustainable forest management and the ILO goal of decent work as set out in international agreements*. Decent work entails creating opportunities for women and men workers to obtain productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity.

8. *There is a need for global forestry policies to discourage markets and trade that counter sustainable forest management while promoting illegal logging, poverty and the concentration of wealth and forest resources into the hands of fewer people.* Workers are concerned about the current patterns of trade in forest products that do not promote re-investment into forests, including the improvement of the living and working conditions of forest-dependent communities.

9. *Few resources are allocated for capacity-building of civil society and trade unions* to ensure effective participation and contributions by these groups to sustainable forest management. To make the most out of forests, workers need to be well equipped, well trained and be included in the decision-making processes; and to be educated on what sustainable forestry is and why sustainability is important.

10. The United Nations Forum on Forests can better address the priorities and concerns of the Workers and Trade Unions' major group by involving the group in ad hoc working groups and other forums used to develop guidelines and indicators for sustainable forest management so that they can share experiences and make suggestions on how forests should be socially beneficial in order to contribute to the objectives of sustainable forest management.

III. Brief assessment of how the United Nations Forum on Forests process has addressed issues of priority for workers and trade unions

11. The United Nations Forum on Forests process has provided BWI with space and access for additional global advocacy to lobby for the inclusion of Core Labour Standards of the ILO as well as other pro-worker issues in global forestry instruments. The fourth and fifth sessions of the United Nations Forum on Forests provided opportunities for BWI to make keynote statements in plenary sessions and use these platforms to call for decent work, social dialogue and a recognition that people and forests must work in harmony.

12. There has been great progress on how major groups are beginning to reach consensus among themselves around issues of common interest in order to create joint statements and positions. This is in contrast to past years when each group would come up with different, and at times conflicting, positions that often resulted in the perception that major groups do not bring added value to the United Nations Forum on Forests process among Member States.

13. This has changed significantly since the sixth session of the Forum and was demonstrated at the recently concluded ad hoc expert group meeting on the consideration of the content of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests, which took place in New York from 11 to 15 December 2006.

IV. Recommendations for a non-legally binding instrument on forests

14. The non-legally binding instrument should remain flexible and prescriptive in language, rather than elaborate or technical, so that it can be viewed as a general policy framework. What is important is that Member States view the non-legally binding instrument as a credible instrument and commit themselves to its implementation.

V. Recommendations for the multi-year programme of work

15. A number of cross-cutting themes should be addressed in the multi-year programme of work. These should include: the role of forests in poverty alleviation and in achieving the MDGs; gender dimensions of forestry; land tenure issues; and human rights of indigenous peoples.